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The second-fastest growing profession

Ray Williams

Coaching is the second-fastest growing profession in the world, rivalled only by information technology. The profession owes its success both to the personal development movement and the huge global economic restructuring since the 1980s. Competition within and among companies, flattened management structures, shrinking talent pools and ineffective leadership have all contributed to the demand for executive coaching.

Executive coaching is an outgrowth of leadership development programs. An article in *The Economist* (November, 2003) concluded executive coaching had become a significant human resource strategy. Recently, the *Harvard Business Review* noted executive and business coaching is worth US\$1-billion a year.

As Sheila Maher and Suzi Pomerantz stated in the *International Journal of Coaching* (2003), coaching predates Anthony Robbins, Stephen Covey, Tom Peters and Ken Blanchard. It is rooted in a range of philosophies and practices that can be traced back to Aristotle, Buddhist thought, Gestalt theory and various ontology and business gurus. It reappeared in the late 1950s, but did not receive much attention until the early 1990s. Although coaching gained widespread acceptance by organizations in the 1990s, it has only flourished in recent years.

Professional executive and business coaches today are hired because:

- Stress and failure of executives has increased;
- Corporate leaders require more complex competencies;
- Executives face more frequent performance assessments;
- The old command and control style of leadership is out of sync with the younger, inner-directed, collaborative and culturally diverse workforce;
- The economic realities of short-term financial success have placed enormous pressure on organizations.

A coach should be a trusted role model, advisor, guide and mentor who helps executives shape visions, tap new

energies, and generate desired results for individuals as well as their companies. A coach is not a therapist, counsellor or management consultant, although sometimes consulting and coaching can intertwine. Two factors distinguish executive coaching from other kinds: it always involves a partnership between the executive, the coach and the organization; and the individual goals must link back and be integrated into strategic organizational objectives. The most effective use of executive coaches is when the company incorporates executive coaching into its strategic initiatives.

And executive coaching has proven positive returns on investment, employee relationships and work engagement, according to *Fortune 500* companies such as IBM, Dell, Bristol Myers, Johnson & Johnson and Boeing. Evidence from studies conducted by the Manchester Group and others, demonstrate that executive coaching is a sound investment and can be applied to a wide variety of human resource and business issues.

Coaches can help executives build interpersonal relationships and emotional intelligence; improve job performance and enhance organizational performance; improve teamwork and culture development; increase training effectiveness; human resource planning and capital development; and transition to a new leadership position.

When it comes to picking a coach, though, it's buyer beware! Unfortunately, there are a lot of people out there calling themselves executive coaches but lack knowledge and expertise in human dynamics, leadership theory and practices with an action-orientation, teaching and mentoring, organizational development and business practices — as well as coaching training recognized by the International Coach Federation.

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